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Letter dated 29 September 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw to your attention the statement on the situation in Nigeria, issued on 18 September 1998, by the Presidency of the European Union (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Ernst **Sucharipa**
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to the United Nations

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Annex

[Original: English and French]

Statement on the situation in Nigeria, issued on 18 September 1998, by the Presidency of the European Union

The European Union welcomes recent developments in Nigeria. In particular, it appreciates the commitment of the Government to engage in a democratization process. In this context, the European Union welcomes the establishment of a new electoral commission that has already issued guidelines on the registration of political parties and a detailed timetable for the election process, the first step of which, the preliminary registration of the parties, has just been successfully concluded. We will be prepared to support the elections technically and to send election observers, if so requested by the Nigerian authorities.

The European Union also acknowledges the efforts made by the Head of State to base the membership of the newly established Federal Executive Council on broad representation from the various regions. We further welcome the publication of the 1995 draft constitution which had been withheld for such a long time.

The Union recognizes the release of a large number of political prisoners during the past months, including the "Ogoni 20". The European Union expects that those still remaining in detention will also be released in due course, and that Decree No. 2, providing for detention without trial, will be repealed. The Union further welcomes the Government's promise to protect freedom of association and its steps to lift restrictions on trade union activity, as well as its decision to readmit the Academic Staff Union of Universities.

The European Union also notes promises of the Government to protect freedom of expression, in particular, freedom of the press, and acknowledges the first steps to reorganize media laws as a concrete follow-up in this regard. The Union hopes that Decree No. 43, obliging print media to renew their registration each year, will be repealed soon.

In the context of human rights, the Union further welcomes the invitation extended to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on 16 September to visit Nigeria.

The European Union encourages the Government of Nigeria to continue its efforts in re-establishing a democratic society, characterized by the observance of human rights and based on the rule of law. The European Union will continue to further this aim by intensifying the political dialogue, which began with British Minister of State Lloyd's visit to Nigeria, representing the European Union Presidency, and was continued by visits of Ministers of other European Union member States on a bilateral basis.

The European Union calls upon all sectors of Nigerian society to participate in this promising process of democratization and stresses its readiness to cooperate with all political forces committed to democratic principles, the rule of law and to assisting in the building of a civil society.

The Union finally looks forward to the normalization of relations between the European Union and Nigeria, on the understanding that the positive developments in the country will continue. In recognition of specific progress towards democratization and in response to tangible achievements in Nigeria's transition to civilian rule, the European Union stands ready to review its Common Position of 1995 and the sanctions contained therein.

The Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus associated with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association countries, Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.